

# The Columbus Dispatch

## SAFETY CONCERNS

# GOLF-COURSE HILLS MOSTLY OFF-LIMITS TO SLEDDERS

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Children and adults in search of a chilly downhill thrill will find their sleds pulled out from under them at many central Ohio golf courses.

Fear of lawsuits and concerns about runners slicing up sod long have led some golf-course operators to ban snow *sledding* on their grounds.

Granville Golf Course banned it about 10 years ago after a spate of injuries to sledders who struck an above-ground water pump, but sledders continued to sneak onto the grounds. So a 4-foot by 8-foot no-*sledding* and no-trespassing sign is a new fixture this winter at the Licking County course.

"After a few too many emergency-squad calls, we had to stop *sledding*," general manager Rodney Butt said. "It's a safety thing and a liability and insurance issue. We've never been sued, but we don't want to be sued, obviously."

Granville police now help by regularly running sledders off the course," Butt added.

Terry Kelso, president of the Associated Insurance Agencies of Westerville, said liability issues involving trespassing sledders have concerned golf-course operators for years.

Many golf courses have quietly looked the other way but now might be having second thoughts, he said. "It's all downside and no upside for the golf-course owner."

Even though a golf course might erect "no *sledding*" signs, if someone hits his or her head on a rock and dies while *sledding*, its owners could still be liable, he said.

The Columbus Department of Recreation and Parks, which operates seven golf courses, has a decades-old policy that bans *sledding*, spokeswoman Terri Leist said.

"Technically, our courses are open for play 365 days a year. It's a policy we've always had, and we really don't have too many problems," she said.

Still, some children can't resist a snow-covered hill, no matter how small.

"Our course is pretty flat, but we have one little hill that goes down to our driving range. We had to chase a couple of kids off (Sunday)," said Shane Freeman, assistant pro at the city-owned Turnberry

Golf Course in Pickerington.

Yet, some golf courses continue to welcome sledders. The Scioto Country Club in Upper Arlington, for example, allows members-only *sledding*.

Metro Parks permits *sledding* at its lone golf course. Sledders can access a hill on the 11th hole at Blacklick Golf Course on E. Livingston Avenue in Reynoldsburg, spokeswoman Peg Hanley said.

Park workers, however, will close the hill if it becomes too icy or melting snow leaves grassy areas that make the turf vulnerable to damage, she said.

The simple act of sliding down a snowy hill can be deceptively dangerous.

More than 46,000 Americans -- most age 14 and younger -- are injured annually while riding sleds, toboggans and inflated, metal and plastic tubes and disks, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Dr. Gary Smith, director of the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Children's Hospital in Columbus, said the emergency room staff braces to treat *sledding* injuries after major snowfalls.

"Injuries can range from bruises to life-threatening," he said. "We see kids with head and brain injury from striking objects and sliding into the street and being struck by an automobile."

Children's Hospital treated 168 children for *sledding* injuries during a recent five-year period, mostly head and neck injuries. Only 3 percent of the injured children were wearing a helmet, he said.

"I always tell parents when they buy a sled, they should buy a helmet."

Dispatch reporter Phil Porter contributed to this story.

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